

Message Text

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ACTION MED-03

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R 152105Z DEC 77

FM AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7492

UNCLAS SANTIAGO 10045

FOR M/MED FROM AMBASSADOR

E. O. 11652: N/A

TGS: AMED

SUBJECT: AIR POLLUTION - SANTIAGO

REF: (A) LETTER TO DCM BOYATT FROM MEDICAL CONSULTANT HERBERT POLLACK

(B) EPA REPORT ON SANTIAGO POLLUTION

1. SINCE ARRIVING AT POST I HAVE REVIEWED THE FILE ON AIR POLLUTION IN SANTIAGO. I VERY MUCH SUPPORT EMBASSY SANTIAGO'S EFFORTS TO FIND A SOLUTION TO THIS DANGEROUS PROBLEM AND LIKEWISE APPLAUD THE DEPARTMENT'S EFFORTS TO BE RESPONSIVE.

2. I HAVE JUST REVIEWED THE REPORT OF DR. ROBERT E. LEE, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE HEALTH EFFECTS RESEARCH LABORATORY OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY, ON THE AIR POLLUTION SITUATION IN SANTIAGO. THE INFORMATION CONTAINED THEREIN, TOGETHER WITH OTHER RECENT MEDICAL REPORTS, IS IN MY JUDGEMENT MOST ALARMING.

3. THE EPA REPORT NOTES THAT IN SANTIAGO THERE ARE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATE WITH TSP, CO AND NO2. I WOULD PARTICULARLY LIKE TO CALL YOUR ATTENTION TO THE FACT THAT SANTIAGO'S AVERAGE HOURLY NO2 LEVELS "CONSISTENTLY READ 1.5 PPM, (COMPARED) TO THE THE CALIFORNIA STATE STANDARD (0.25 PPM) AND THE PROPOSED WHO STANDARD UNCLASSIFIED

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(0.10 TO 0.17 PPM)." IN SHORT, SANTIAGO MEASUREMENTS OF N2 SHOW THAT THEY ARE SIX TIMES GREATER THAN THE CURRENT CALIFORNIA STATE STANDARDS AND TEN TIMES GREATER THAN THE INTERNATIONAL STANDARD. THE LEVELS ARE SO HIGH THAT THE EPA STUDY IS "VERY SUSPICIOUS OF THESE NUMBERS UNLESS THE MONITORS ARE DIRECTLY INFLUENCE BY A SOURCE SUCH AS STATIONARY COMBUSTION ACTIVITY AND/OR UNFOVORABLE METEOROLOGICAL CONDITIONS." AS YOU KNOW,

SANTIAGO IS VIRTUALLY SURROUNDED BY MOUNTAINS AND SUFFERS FROM VERY LONG INVERSIONS MAY TIMES DURING THE YEAR. THUS, "UNFAVORABLE METEOROLOGICAL CONITIONS" DO EXIST MUCH OF THE TIME. IN ANY CASE, IT IS INCUMBENT UPON THE DEPARTMENT TO PROVE, AND TO PROVE QUICKLY, WHETHER OR NOT THE EXTREMELY HIGH LEVELS OF NO2 REPORTED TO IN FACT EXIST. IF THE LEVELS ARE AS REPORTED -- AND I THINK THE DATA WILL BE CONFIRMED -- THEN AS THE EPA REPORT STATES, "SOME ACTION SHOULD BE TAKEN TO PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTH."

4. MY ALARM AT THE ABOVE DATA IS COMPOUNDED BY THE RECENT STUDIES OF A TEAM OF SCIENTISTS UNDER DR. RONALD RASMUSSEN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT IRVINE. THESE SCIENTISTS, AS REPORTED IN THE LOS ANGELS TIMES, SAY THAT THEIR RESEARCH HAS PROVED THAT "EVEN A LOW LEVEL OF NITROGEN DIOXIDE HAS BEEN PROVED TO BE DESTRUCTIVE TO LIVING CELLS." THE SCIENTISTS FURTHER STATE THAT "THEY BELIEVE THE DESTRUCTION OF LARGE NUMBERS OF CELLS CAN LEAD TO EMPHYSEMA AND MAY BE A FURTHER LINK TO CANCER."

5. THE DEPARTMENT AND THE POST HAVE BEEN JOINTLY ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM OF SMOG HERE FOR TEN MONTHS. I THINK IT IS NOW TIME FOR ACTION. THE EPA STUDY OF POLLUTANTS IN GENERAL AND NO2 IN PARTICULAR CONFIRMS THE VISUAL EVIDENCE OF SMOG AND THE TACTILE EVIDENCE OF BURING EYES WHICH WE ALL KNOW IN SANTIAGO. I WOULD APPRECIATE THE DEPARTMENT'S THINKING ON AN ACTION PLAN PROVIDING MEANINFUL RELIEF FROM SMOG LEVELS ESTABLISHED AS WAY BEYOND THE DANGEROUS STAGE, PARTICULARLY REGARDING NO2. IF FURTHER CONFIRMATION

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OF DATA IS NEEDED, THEN LET'S DO THAT AT ONCE SO THAT WE MAY PROCEED.

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